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Boone legal service for needy may end

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Boone, Ia. -Poor and elderly people may soon go without legal representation in Boone County.

Boone County Legal Aid, which for 31 years has provided legal services to those who couldn't afford them, will close in February if a \$10,000 grant from Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino is not awarded.

The legal service is one of the few programs in Iowa that offers legal representation to those who qualify without turning to the state for its services.

"It is a very sad situation, but that's the fact," said Alan Schroeder, city attorney and supervisor of Boone County Legal Aid. For the past two years using money mostly from the city and county, Schroeder has upheld the outfit alone, taking on about 60 clients a year, and settling cases that range from domestic abuse to bankruptcy. He also has a private practice.

If the legal service closes, he's unsure where his clients will go.

The city of Boone gave Schroeder \$6,300 in July to resolve pending cases, said Kathy Berg, Boone's finance officer. Without that, the program might already be closed.

"All governments are having problems with finances," Boone Mayor George Maybee said. "No one else stepped in. The county didn't. The state didn't."

Donovan Olson, chairman of the county Board of Supervisors, said the board quit funding the legal service in July because it felt the county didn't need it. Drake University ended its funding after the 2000 spring semester "for a variety of reasons," Suzanne Levitt, the law professor who oversaw the program, said via e-mail.

Olson said Schroeder must prove Prairie Meadows is the primary money source for the board to grant the program any more money.

Schroeder ran the program without the help of law students or Drake, which had provided as much as two-thirds of the money in some years. Olson and the board did not want to be the main money source. Schroeder told them he would apply for grants, but he received none.

Schroeder may not hear from Prairie Meadows until March, but he believes he can last until then.